

Part XXII
CACERES

③ - 11,000 lbs

"OLD SPBIN" 1936
N A 6 BONE
36x52



CACERES

WHEREAS in Trujillo all the upper medieval town is broken and abandoned and its quiet that of the graveyard, the palaces of Cáceres are still occupied by families of repute, and the quiet within its steep involved and cobbled streets is that of the absence of traffic. Since no wheeled vehicles venture there, when the streets are often interrupted by steps and the stately old palaces stand aloof remembering their history, all the business and chatter of the newer town circles the hill beneath them—like a stream. The townspeople climb the hill for church and municipal affairs.

It is a long time since I wandered in the Appian Way and sighed over the tomb of Caecilia Metella. Suddenly Rome seems a short time ago and its distance bridged by a human link, for the town camp of Cáceres was built by the Roman, Caecilius Metellus—alas! they never thought very much of him.

In waterless Cáceres water plays an important part. The life of the streets owes much in colour to the water-carriers. Its fountains are thronged with women and girls, who carry a very tall and graceful classic pitcher upon their heads, supporting it upon a circular padded wad of gay colours

from which hangs a pendant behind. Processions of women walk with the easy dignified carriage of those who bear weights on their heads, climbing the steep streets with a slow dignity as if performing some ritual of the highway, their beautiful jars appearing like the strange head-dress of some slow rhythmic dance or rite.

But the strangest relic in Cáceres is in the site of the old Moorish Alcázar and a legacy of the ancient Arabian wisdom in water. The underground cisterns of Yeri Batán in Constantinople have a smaller counterpart in Cáceres. But whereas those of Constantine are like a vast Byzantine cathedral flooded with water, with Byzantine capitals to the pillars, between which one glides in a light boat, those of Cáceres are supported on heavy horseshoe arches and are only the size of a considerable swimming-bath. In time of siege and drought this city on the hill in the centre of a wild heath reaching to mountain barriers must have blessed the Arabian knowledge and skill in storing cool water.

From the window of the house of the Veletas one looks over the country. The walls are below. The two strange Moorish defence towers are on either side, remains of smaller towers show broken edges. The fortified palace of the Moorish Emir, with its cisterns of water, seemed impregnable in its position. The men of Babel were not alone in history in their desire to build a tower to make them as gods. The chastisement of pride and presumption was measured out in Cáceres. San Gimignano of the beautiful towers suffered no more drastic curtailment of the arrogance of its nobles than did Cáceres under the order of Isabella the Catholic. 'All towers to be cut down to the level of the roofs of the houses, except that of the family of Captain Diego Cáceres Ovando, for services to the Catholic Kings in the battle of Toro', must have been a formidable object-lesson in the fifteenth century. That is why one looks upward in the street and sees a gallery on corbels fit for a castle high on the wall of a house, and only by going to the side of the street one sees the roof cutting short what was evidently the base of a strong and high tower. Towers built later and after Isabella's death are not so threatening nor so arrogant. From the plain

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Drawings , *introducción*

PEASANTS AT THE MARKET (*Headpiece*)

THE CHURCHES AND PALACES OF CACERES

CASA DE LOS GOLFINES, CACERES

THE PLAZA AT NIGHT, CACERES



8-1 (123)





there is a fine barbed crest of them running along the ridge of the town.

Roman foundations, unmistakable as Roman rectitude, carry the Roman working plan. The gate of Santo Cristo, serviceable and robust, is pure Roman. Inscriptions are built into the walls of houses, and above the tower of the clock in the market-place stands the antique Roman statue of Ceres, colossal, august.

The Arabian remains are more scattered. The towers of the old Alcázar and the Moorish wall and tower upon the Roman foundations raise a miniature Alhambra on the hill of Cáceres, and Moorish brickwork is seen here and there in the house fronts and their culture in the irrigation of the orchards and gardens. But the lasting imprint of the town is that of the Conquistadores and

medieval nobles, whose mutilated towers endure in the clear dry air of the plain.

The cleanliness of Cáceres is purchased by much labour. The cobbles are brushed energetically by the women with short besoms of green broom, and the water carried from steep distances. One never ceases wondering what that exile who built a palace in Cáceres thought of Spain when he had crossed the Atlantic. Perhaps the prospect of re-crossing the sea was worse than the thought of staying. Perhaps travel enlarged his mind—or perhaps simply he was never allowed to go back. The 'sun in his splendour' marks the house assigned to this child of the sun—a grim little plaza contains the palace—a circumscribed life for an emperor, one thinks, with the rainbow fading on the Andes.

